

HISTORY OF ISAAC DENNISON NEWELL

By Cora Cole Fish

Background:

The Geanalogical Geriside to the early settlers of America (Vol. 1, page 384) states: "Abraham Newell came to America on the ship Francis, 1634, from Ipswich, England. He was fifty years old and his wife, Frances, was forty." Several children are also listed: Faith, Ruth, Grace, Abraham, John, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob was born on the ship coming over. The Roxberry town records say Abraham died in 1672 (age 91) and Frances in 1683 (age 100) so both lived to be very old.

Descendants of this family spread all over the East but the Vermont branch are apparently Dr. Isaac Dennison's branch of the Newells. Dr. Newell was born at Tinmouth, Vt., 1799. He was a graduate of the Literary and Theological Seminary at Hamilton, Madison County, N. Y. This seminary is now part of Colgate University.

Before coming to Illinois he married Sarah Greene. (This name is spelled Green in some histories, but as she was the granddaughter of General Greene who was Washington's top General in the Revolution, Greene is the correct spelling.) As a very young man Dr. Newell held pastorates in Warren, and Winfield, N. Y., and in Danville and Rutlands, Vt. He and Sarah Greene were married June 25, 1826. She died Nov. 23, 1854 and he died May 18, 1857.

Three children were born before they came West: two daughters, and a son, Harriett, Sarah Jane, and Isaac Dennison. Harriett later married Dr. Justice Buckley of Alton, and Sarah Jane who married Hermon Camp Cole and after his death married Rev. John C. C. Clarke. The youngest child, the son, also named Isaac Dennison Newell, was born at Rushville, Ill., 1834. My grandmother (Sarah Jane Newell) was born at Winfield, N. Y. and I believe Harriett was also born there. Harriett was about a year older than Sarah Jane who was born in 1834. I do not have the exact dates of Harriett's marriage or her death. George Ide Newell was probably born 1827 or 1828.

I have a most interesting framed life long membership document which was presented to Dr. Newell by the First Baptist Church of Winfield, N. Y. and is to the membership American Bible Society. This original Winfield church burned down about 40 years ago and has been replaced by a new one. I wrote them to try to find out all I could about the family but the church fire destroyed all records. What they were able to collect from people's memories was of little help. They did verify that Dr. Newell was there but no exact dates as to when he came or left Winfield. I think it must have been about 1832 or early 33 because I know they left Rutlands, Vt. to come on West in 1834. The Merriam family of Springfield, Ill. and the Newells came across country together. They started in mid spring but did not reach Illinois until very late fall. They went first to Springfield, Ill., where the Merriam family stayed. But the Newells went to Rushville for a short time and then to Peoria, Ill.

I do have an account of the cross country trip written by Sarah Greene Newell. As they were all "green horns" they made the bad mistake of starting out in carriages instead of sensible wagons or better still a Conestoga covered wagon. They broke several axels on the way that had to be mended or replaced. It was too late to go back by the time they realized the mistake, unless they waited another year to make the trip. They could not buy strong wagons anywhere along the way. I remember as a very young girl asking my grandmother if she came west in a covered wagon and she laughed and answered: "No, my dear, we came in carriages because we were too ignorant about the trip to know any better, but we would have been far better off in Conestoga wagons."

Ministers, regardless of what church they were affiliated with, did all they could to help other ministers and their families to cross the country. There were no hotels or any place to stop over night unless people did take them in along the way. So it was customary to go to the homes of these ministers, who gladly took them in as they were starved for news from the Eastern States. The few settlements were so far apart one could not count on making it from one to another in a day so one often had to camp out. Also, few settlements had resident ministers as many of the ministers did "circuit riding" from one settlement to another on horse back.

In one place darkness caught up with them and there was no moon to help so they camped in an abandoned cabin in the woods. It was very filthy but they cleaned it out the best they could. It was also very cold weather so they managed to get wood to make a fire in the fire place. The roof leaked so badly they had to be careful where they put the children in case it rained during the night. With the fire going the men did not dare sleep for fear of Indians or other marauders getting away with their horses, carriages, and contents, and the danger from fire place sparks catching the old roof on fire. The letter states it was the most miserable night Sarah Greene Newell ever spent in her life and no doubt was for all of them. Springfield, Illinois gave them all a most cordial welcome and did all they could to keep the Newells there, but after resting a few days they pushed on to Rushville and he became minister of the First Baptist Church there.

The oldest son, George Ide Newell grew up and attended the Rochester College for Ministers but died while at college in 1853. He was born at Warren, Herkimer County, N. Y.

The First Baptist Church, Peoria, Illinois, was founded in 1836, and was very shaky financially and also very disorganized in 1843. They called Rev. Newell to their pulpit to help them reorganize and put the church on its feet financially. At that time some law made it impossible for churches to own property (as churches). So in order to own their own property they decided to reorganize as a "Religious Society" which they did until laws were changed so they could operate as a church and still own property. They bought a lot on Hamilton Street. The membership under Dr. Newell's guidance had increased a lot and they needed a church so they sent Rev. Newell back East to solicit funds and the congregation solicited in Peoria, Ill. All

were successful and the new church was built in early 1846. The church was right up-to-date and had the first gas lights and the first bell in Peoria.

Later that year, 1846, Dr. Newell resigned to go to Shurtleff College at Alton, as their financial manager. Dr. Newell and John M. Peck had been close friends for years and both vitally interested in the school of Illinois. Earlier Rev. Newell had helped set up a ladies seminary at Peoria that was very successful and his own daughter attended school there and later Sarah returned to teach at the Seminary. In 1842, Rev. John M. Peck, for Shurtleff College, presented an honorary degree of Bachelor of Arts to Rev. Newell in appreciation of his outstanding work for education in Illinois. After moving here (Alton) in 1846 as financial manager for the college, he traveled all over the state to interest influential people in the college and to get funds from individuals and Baptist Churches. The college finances were in such bad condition when Dr. Newell took over the finances it was about to close. There was no endowment fund, not even money to pay professors, but Dr. Newell was so successful collecting funds and getting people interested in the college, he soon straightened things out making more buildings, a good laboratory and more teachers possible.

The Newell family moved to Alton in 1846. They bought a house on College Avenue, just opposite (slightly west of it) where Annex Avenue enters College. This large red brick home is still standing and is now class rooms for Southern Illinois University. The Newells lived in this home for many years and the place was not sold out of the Newell and Cole family until 1914.

Dr. Newell resigned from the College in 1849. The continual traveling, lecturing, etc. had undermined his health. So he was not physically able to continue as their financial agent. From then on he did not accept any permanent calls for churches but did preach occasionally to help the churches out.

After retiring Dr. Newell went up to Iowa and bought a large tract of land but never lived there. On a business trip there in 1856 he was thrown from a sleigh and very badly injured. He started home to Alton but did not get any further than Carrollton, Illinois. He stopped at the home of his daughter, Harriett and his son-in-law, Rev. Justice Buckley, and remained with them until August 18, 1857, when he died. His first wife had died at Alton, Nov. 23, 1854. He remarried in 1855. He married Cecelia E. Bishop of Philadelphia, Penn. There were no children by that marriage. She lived a long time after his death and her sister came to live with her in Alton. This was the grandmother my father, aunts and uncles knew and loved very much. She was a very fine, very well educated and cultured woman, deeply devoted to the Upper Alton Baptist Church and the college as long as she lived. The exact date of her death I do not know but it is around 1876. Sarah Jane Newell was educated in Rushville and Peoria Ladies Seminary where she taught after graduation. Her first marriage was to a Mr. Flanigan of Carrollton, Ill. Mr. Flanigan died from tuberculosis less than a year after they were married. Feb. 13, 1862, she married Hermon Camp Cole at Carrollton,

Illinois. They lived in Chester, Ill. until 1868 when they came to Alton to live. (see record on Hermon Camp Cole for more about her). She lived in Alton until her death in Feb. 1914. There were five children of this marriage: Cora, Grace, Hermon, and Nathan and Newell (twins). Their record is in the Hermon Camp Cole History.

Harriett Newell married Rev. Justice Buckley. He was a graduate of Shurtleff College (ministerial department). They first lived at Carrollton where he was minister of the First Baptist Church there for a few years, and then came back to Shurtleff College where he was Professor in charge of the Divinity College there. They had a daughter, Emma, who graduated at Shurtleff College and later married Mr. Vedder, a druggist at Rushville. Their daughter Callie graduated at Shurtleff and died very soon afterwards. The third daughter, Bertha, was educated and graduated at Shurtleff with full intention of being a foreign missionary. In college she met Edgar Roach, a ministerial student, also planning to do foreign missionary work after graduation. They were married almost immediately after they graduated and went to Rangoon Burma; she went as a missionary and he went to teach in the Baptist University at Rangoon. He was made President of the University and both remained there all their lives. After many years there, a village some distance from Rangoon had a dreadful cholera epidemic. The natives feared cholera so much that natives from other villages would not go to help each other out as cholera was almost certain death and also terribly contagious. Word came into Rangoon of the bad plight of this village but no native Burmese would go near them. So Bertha Roach immediately got food, medicine and all the help she could together and against all orders and advise of the Burmese government officials, she went to the village alone to do anything she could to help them out. The village had no Christians in it and were strictly heathens. Her work and care of the people down with cholera not only saved many already ill people but prevented others taking cholera. Natives had never heard of any kind of sanitation and gladly turned to her for help that their own "witch doctors" had failed to give them. When the natives were over the epidemic and very few left still recovering, Mrs. Roach took cholera herself. She had such a violent case she only lived a few hours. Runners rushed to Rangoon to inform Dr. Roach of her death and he rushed out to the village, but would not permit anyone else to go with him. Cholera victims must be buried before sundown by Burmese law. At that time had to be burned, also. I believe that law still holds good in several extremely hot countries where there is either no embalming or it is financially out of the question. The village people made the burning pyre as "grandly" as they knew how to and waited for Dr. Roach to get there. When he arrived the elders and village head man requested they be allowed to "bury" Mrs. Roach with "honors" (heathen, of course) only given to their most honored head men but never before given any woman. Naturally Dr. Roach was a bit shocked at having his deeply Christian wife buried with full heathen rights. Also he ran a risk of severe criticisms from the Baptist Missionary Organization and the University Board. The natives were so grateful to Mrs. Roach and so anxious to show her honor that he consented. So she was burned with the fullest heathen services and followed to her pyre by all those who could walk in the village.

The Baptist Mission Board, University Trustees and native Burmese all thoroughly approved what he had done. They had four children. After his wife's death, the father sent the children to American Missionary Schools as they were still too young to just turn over to natives to care for.

Isaac Dennison Newell, Jr. was educated at Peoria and Alton and graduated at Shurtleff College. Apparently his interest was business and not work toward the ministry. After graduation on Feb. 4, 1859, he married Almira H. Flanagan, at Bunker Hill, Ill. I think she was a sister of Sarah Jane's (Newell) husband. They were not married a year when she also died in May of 1859 from tuberculosis like her brother. Isaac Dennison Newell, Jr. was living at Bunker Hill, Ill. when the Civil War broke out. The very day Fort Sumpter was fired on, President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers and Isaac D. Newell, Jr. enlisted that day. He served his three months training in the 7th Illinois at Cairo and Mound City, then reenlisted for the duration. He was in the battles at Belmont, Fort Henry, Fort Donaldson, Gettysburg Landing and Siege of Corinth. He was made color bearer and received Honorable Mention by Act of Congress. He was offered a captaincy which he refused. While at Corinth he received a commission direct from President Lincoln, as 1st Lieutenant and reported to General A. W. Ellet at St. Louis. In Jan., 1863, he received a captaincy, also, direct from President Lincoln, in the 1st Infantry Regiment of the Mississippi Marine Brigade and was not mustered out until January, 1865, at Vicksburg.

After leaving service he was associated with his uncle, Hermon Camp Cole, at Chester, Ill. In 1867, he married Anna Grace Bartlett. He probably met her in St. Louis while in service there as she was from St. Louis. They went back to Alton where he attended Shurtleff to study for the ministry. Later he went on to Crozen Seminary, graduating there in 1871. He was then 34 years old. After getting his degree he was ordained and they went to Grenville, Neb. He was First Baptist Church minister there, and later at Hastings, Grand Island, Survul, and a member of the State Convention Board. He was also County Superintendent of Schools for Clay County and spent one winter at the Baptist Church at Muskagee Indian Territory. In 1904 he returned to Grenville and became State Historian for the Baptist Convention and member of the State Board until his death on Oct. 24, 1914. Grace Bartlett Newell died Nov. 14, 1912.

The Newells made visits to my grandmother (who was their aunt) when I was a child and I remember them very well. I have also heard from their children and now their grandchildren. One of the grandsons is now a Baptist Minister at Cleveland Heights, Ohio. They are all highly educated and cultured people who are living religious and fine lives.

Dr. Newell's and Grace Bartlett Newell's son, Albert, also served under Teddy Roosevelt in the Cuban Independence War in 1898. The two daughters married and one lived in Hastings, Neb. and one in Manhattan, Kansas. Dr. Isaac Dennison Newell was my great grandfather.

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